'You're not just learning it, you're living it!' Constructing the 'good life' in Australian university online promotional videos

Kristina Gottschall*[a] and Sue Saltmarsh[b]

[a]Charles Sturt University, School of Indigenous Australian Studies; [b]Australian Catholic University, Faculty of Education and Arts

Online promotional videos on Australian university websites are a form of institutional branding and marketing that construct university experience in a variety of ways. In this paper, we consider how these multimedia texts represent student lifestyles, identities and aspirations in terms of the 'good life'. We consider how the 'promise of happiness' is deployed as an appeal to perceived consumer desires within the local student market, as well as within the highly competitive global knowledge economy. These texts position university students as youthful, attractive, active and fun, and depict student life as being about leisure and pleasure. Such representations promote cultural and social entitlement to the 'good life' as if synonymous with choice, participation and success in higher education. Learning and scholarship are depicted as secondary activities. We also contend that claims to cosmopolitanism and consumerism are framed by racialised entitlements through which an appeal to Whiteness as both commodity and context is maintained.

Keywords: branding strategies; marketing higher education; visual culture; student as consumer; university choice

Promoting the university in the education marketplace

University marketing is by now a well-established global phenomenon that has accompanied the marketization and internationalization of higher education in recent decades (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Sidhu, 2003; Stier & Börjesson, 2010). University marketing strategies take many forms, including advertising in mainstream media outlets, recruitment drives and university 'open days', and on increasingly sophisticated websites incorporating multimedia tools such as podcasts and videos. For the 'enterprise university' (Marginson & Considine, 2000) in Australia as elsewhere, university websites have become important 'brand communication tools' (Chapleo, Durán, & Diáz, 2011, p. 26) through which institutional and consumer identities are constructed in the global higher education marketplace. The marketing and promotional practices of universities are not without contention, however, and as some scholars observe, the 'branding of universities is likely to involve an ongoing

* Corresponding author email: kgottshall@csu.edu.au

negotiation of representations where both "what" and "who" are being branded is constantly under scrutiny' (Aspara, Aula, Tienari, & Tikkanen, 2014, p. 526).

In this paper, we query the ways in which Australian university online promotions function as branding technologies that privilege notions of lifestyle over learning, offering prospective higher education consumers entitlement to what Sarah Ahmed (2010) refers to as 'the promise of happiness'. Focusing here on video texts embedded in the websites of Australian universities, our paper considers how discourses of educational consumption and participation are mapped onto student subjectivities via online university branding and promotions. We understand these texts, like other online texts, as technologies that 'contribute to the production of contemporary knowledges and understandings of our world and ourselves' (Cranny-Francis, 2005, p. 22), with specific reference to their construction of meanings about participating in various aspects of university life. We argue that the video texts analysed here draw on idealised norms of gender, sexuality, class, race/ethnicity, age, and ableism to construct university participation and success primarily as a means of accessing the 'good life' characterised by pleasure and leisure.

We situate this work against the backdrop of broader concerns about the reconfiguration of universities and university participation under neoliberal governance and higher education reforms in recent decades (Olssen & Peters, 2005; Peters, 2011; Peters & Olssen, 2011). As Jill Blackmore (2014) describes it, 'neoliberal policy orthodoxy advocates reduced government expenditure, privatisation of educational provision and the mobilisation of individual choice based on the false promise of optimising individual and national outcomes' (p. 500). While an extended discussion of the orthodoxies of neoliberal higher education reforms is beyond the scope of this discussion, we note the intensification of market-driven practices associated with building and attracting students to institutional brands in a competitive global knowledge economy.

We are also mindful of Julie Rowlands and Shaun Rawolle's (2013) contention that the impact of neoliberalism on education is not singular, and that neoliberal economic theory intersects with 'broad processes of change such as globalisation, managerialism, mediatisation and the growth of the knowledge-based economy [that] have been explored as separate historical and social forces which impact education and educational provision' (p. 264). We acknowledge this intersection of forces and the ways that they operate together to constitute educational consumers within a global market predicated on 'rights-based claims based on individual choice' (Blackmore, 2014, p. 509). In what some have referred to as a 'neoliberal "politics of aspiration" ', in which citizens are held responsible for making consumer choices to maximise their opportunities' (Sellar, Gale, & Parker, 2011, p. 38), economic values and principles are 'linked with the achievement of personal success and, even, of happiness' (Rowlands & Rawolle, 2013, p. 263).

These intersecting forces, logics and orthodoxies driving higher education policy reforms have had significant implications for the ways that university students are conceived of and constructed within the sector. As Jill Blackmore (2003) observes regarding the marketized higher education context, the university student is –

> … no longer the 'embodiment of generalised social, national or ethnic values', the passive recipient of knowledge, a 'reasoning individual of the Enlightenment', but is a more volatile object/subject as 'a consuming individual'. (p. 3)

Lolich (2011) concurs, suggesting that contemporary discourses in higher education 'centre around the notion of educating for a smart economy and conceptualise the

student as an economic, independent, rational and care-less individual' (p. 272). Some have argued that these discourses have follow-on effects in the ways that students see themselves, as clients in a contractual arrangement with an institution (Onsman, 2008), as economic subjects pursuing career and financial goals (Saltmarsh, 2011), as 'having' not 'doing' (Molesworth, Nixon, & Scullion, 2009), and as consumers of a product, rather than participants in a process (Saltmarsh, 2004).

We see the marketing and branding approaches that have become prevalent in online university promotional texts both as constructing idealised students and appealing to potential students in precisely these terms. In other words, these approaches align what is offered to the marketplace as an educational choice with perceived consumer lifestyles and desires. In the sections that follow, we consider some of the specific textual practices through which university online promotions construct and position potential students as seeking and accessing the 'good life' through their choice of and alignment to university brands. Our claims about the ways such texts explicitly appeal to perceived consumer values, anxieties and desires are supported through discussion of the university marketing and branding literature, as well as through analysis of video texts embedded in the websites of Australian universities.

Branding place and pleasure: happiness, belonging and learning for the 'good life'

As noted above, in the intensely competitive global knowledge economy, universities have increasingly looked toward marketing strategies as a means of distinguishing themselves from competitors. Although O'Loughlin, MacPhail, & Msetfi (2015) assert that both academic and university reputations are among the most important factors influencing the choice of prospective students, there is acknowledgement that:

> The reputation of a university may differ across groups in society, ranging from the opinions of the population as a whole to academics within a discipline. The gap between reputation and current performance will be narrower the more informed are the respondents. (Williams & Van Dyke, 2008, p. 2)

Effectively competing for students requires appealing to a broad range of perceptions and expectations concerning what the university has to offer, placing pressure on tertiary institutions 'to manage and market their corporate brands and develop a favourable reputation among their stakeholders' (O'Loughlin et al., 2015, p. 808). In their view, perspectives from the field of marketing involves promoting both reputation and institutional identity:

> By effectively benchmarking reputation (what a corporation is known for based upon past action) to identity (what a corporation stands for and wishes to be known for), positive and consistent messages are communicated, long-term stakeholder relationships are fostered and market success is achieved. (p. 808)

From such a vantage point, constructing institutional reputations and identities in ways that effectively appeal to consumers requires more than promoting perceived qualities of the educational goods and services on offer. As is the case with other forms of educational marketing, such promotions can thus be seen as 'symbolically and materially promot[ing] a system of values framing specific educational culture'

(Gottschall, et al., 2010, p. 22). This involves anticipating the kinds of corporate values with which consumers are likely to identify, and giving consideration to 'the nature of a brand both as an entity (reflector of brand identity and stakeholder identities) and as a process (of stakeholder actions and reactions)' (Aspara et al., 2014, p. 526). Indeed, marketing research concerned with the university sector suggests that 'Brand preferences are likely to be influenced by consumers' values, which may be linked to particular product attributes' (Gray, Fam, & Llanes, 2003, p. 109), among which are included 'dependability (reliability); longevity (durability); leisure (convenience); aesthetic (attractiveness); frugality (expense); and simplicity values (how complicated is it?)' (Alreck & Settle, 1999, cited in Gray et al., 2003, p. 109).

Representing the institution in ways that are assumed will correspond with and appeal to consumer values and attributes speaks to the ways that advertising and promotional texts (like other textual forms) are implicated in the ways that subjectivities are both constructed and negotiated through the process of engaging with text. As Anne Cranny-Francis (2005) observes, users of multimedia texts 'encounter a range of values and attitudes in the process of reading, viewing and listening that they negotiate by reference to their own cultural history and values' (p. 22). Their views, beliefs, feelings and actions may be reinforced or contested in this process, however:

> In either case the individual's subject positioning is renegotiated in this transaction: values confirmed or challenged; attitudes reinforced or undermined; corresponding emotional responses reinforced or constrained; potential actions confirmed or opened to question. (Cranny-Francis, 2005, p. 22)

It is this constitutive work of multimedia promotional texts that interests us here, and in particular the ways website visitors are invited to envisage the university as a place that is both attuned and responsive to desires for the 'good life'. The function of this type of 'place-branding', as Ravinder Sidhu (2003) puts it, 'is to construct, and sell, an imagined place to live for the duration of one's study sojourn' (p. 213). Not unlike many other types of advertising texts, these branded appeals to the 'good life' imply enjoyable social lives, strategic experiences in the higher education space, and promising career prospects that might eventuate as a consequence of consumer choice. However, we would suggest that such claims in multimedia texts can also be read through the lens of Sara Ahmed's (2010) work regarding the cultural politics of happiness. For Ahmed, happiness has come to occupy a prominent albeit problematic place in contemporary life, such that it becomes difficult to imagine meaningful lives and futures without thinking about happiness as a signifier of that which is good:

> For some, the good life is the happy life. Or the virtuous person is the happy person. Or the best society is the happiest society. Happiness becomes not only the thing we want, whatever it is, but a measure of the good, such that happiness becomes a sign that the good must have already been achieved. (p. 205)

As Ahmed points out, contemporary notions of happiness are less closely associated with the sense of random luck or fortune that underpin the term's original meaning, and tend to be seen instead as something that one actively seeks to achieve through deliberate choices, acts, and interpretations. Happiness, in this figuring of it, is not something that happens to us, but rather something that we aspire to, work on and endeavour to bring about. 'It is not simply that we desire happiness but that happiness

is imagined as what you get in return for desiring well' (Ahmed, 2010, p. 37).

For our purposes here, to desire a university education, or perhaps more correctly, the *right* university education, is to desire well and to ostensibly be rewarded with the promise and experience of self-actualisation, personal fulfilment, and the enjoyment of leisure and pleasure. We see such narratives continually at play in online university promotions, in which the individual, the commercial and the social are directed toward activities of choosing (a university or program), acquiring (educational qualifications, social networks, job opportunities) and achieving (educational and career goals, personal happiness, *and* consumer satisfaction), which together signify one's access to the good life as both present and future entitlements. As Ahmed (2010) argues, 'for a life to count as a good life, it must take on the direction promised as a social good, which means imaging one's futurity in terms of reaching certain points along a life course' (p. 71).

The discourses of university online promotions that we analyse in this paper rest in no small measure on these very meanings. What one envisages in terms of both university experience and future prospects is constructed as a consequence of choosing well and conducting oneself as an appropriate participant in university life, conceived of in narrow ways. However, as Ahmed's (2012) work on higher education notes, the various ways of endeavouring to attract prospective students within these appeals to consumer choice and imagined futures, 'some bodies more than others are recruited, those that can inherit and reproduce the character of the organization, by reflecting its image back to itself, by having a "good likeness" ' (p. 40). Through the university website examples analysed in the following sections, we argue that, as promotional mechanisms for tertiary institutions, websites commodify student subjectivities and lifestyles that, at their core, are conservative, privileged and exclusionary. We contend that the marketing of higher education in this way treats learning as a coincidental by-product of university experience, and places more emphasis on leisure, lifestyle, and personal fulfilment than on educational achievement, scholarly learning, or intellectual development.

In methodological terms, we understand the visual as expressly discursive (Rose, 2012), and multimodal and visual texts as utilising semiotic resources including visual, sonic, motive and written signs to produce cultural meanings (Cranny-Francis, 2005). Our approach to analyzing multimodal visual texts, therefore, is drawn from the intersecting fields of multimodal discourse analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; 2006; van Leeuwen, 2005), social semiotics of multimodal texts (Cranny-Francis, 2005) and visual culture (Mirzoeff, 1999; Rose, 2012). While an extended discussion of these is beyond the scope of this paper, we take as a starting point Gillian Rose's contention that the meanings of 'found visual images' (2012) occur at multiple sites:

> specifically, 'the site of *production*, the site of the *image or object itself*, and the site of its *audiencing*' – as well as 'the *technological*, the *social* and the *compositional'* modalities of each of these. (p. 346, original emphasis)

Our analysis here focuses primarily on the social and compositional modalities at play at the sites of the online videos, attending to the semiotic resources through which social meanings are constructed (van Leeuwen, 2005) in contemporary global discourses of higher education. We are particularly interested in the ways that these operate in dialogue with the 'transcultural permeability of cultures and the instability of identity' (Mirzhoeff, 1999, p. 25), a consideration of which, Mirzhoeff suggests, is a key task for analysts of visual culture.

The identification and selection of texts for analysis here involved regular visits to the websites of all 39 Australian universities over a period of two months, during which we identified 10 that featured video clips on their main websites. While this present study is focused on the Australian higher education sector, we acknowledge that the selection process for a larger study incorporating online promotions in use by countries beyond Australia would necessarily require different inclusion and exclusion criteria for the selection of sites for analysis. Limitations of space have guided the decision to analyse two of the ten available video clips in depth, whilst showing how similar appeals to leisure and lifestyle are operationalized in the others as well. In the sections that follow, we consider how the video texts of Australian universities construct the social dimensions of university experience in terms of happiness discourses, both as immediate pleasures and future rewards. As ways of producing and reproducing the social world, such texts are understood here as legitimating and normalising particular ways of knowing while marginalising others.

'You're not just learning it, you're living it': pleasure and leisure in campus life

Out of 39 Australian Universities, 10 have video clips embedded on their main website pages at the time of writing. These videos employ image, sound and text to construct impressions of university life in which lifestyle is privileged over learning. Student identities are constructed as youthful, physically attractive, active and fun, and depictions of everyday university activities are focused on leisure and pleasure as everyday norms. The photo-realism used in all of these digital texts 'normalises and naturalises activities as "real", shifting focus away from their function as constructed, idealised and fetishised texts' (Gottschall, et al., 2010, p. 23). As marketing texts, these videos offer a 'promise of happiness' (Ahmed, 2010) to prospective higher education consumers, in which happiness functions as a commodity that can be acquired through educational choice. The videos invite consumers to consider the lifestyle options claimed to be on offer at each particular university, in order to access the 'good life' characterized by pleasurable lifestyles, aspirations and social networks.

Charles Sturt University's (CSU) 32nd video entitled 'You're living it', provides a striking example of the ways that lifestyle and leisure are presented as ideals of university participation:

> *'You're living it'*
>
> This 30-second video bombards viewers with a rapid succession of action scenes, and loud electro-dance music suggesting movement and intensity. The camera provides a first-person perspective, positioning viewers themselves as protagonists moving through rapidly flashing scenes in which 'hands on' learning activities are framed and punctuated by images of student life beyond the classroom. The video opens with images of students waking, showering and preparing for the day while a Berocca (an effervescent multivitamin product, commonly used as a 'hangover cure') fizzes in a glass, then making coffee and taking it to dorm friends/flatmates. Brief images of students in the library, in nursing and dental labs, or working with animals, are interspersed amongst images of students cycling, running, boxing, and playing basket-ball, bumping into one another at the gym, and other scenes of 'student life'.
>
> A teacher hands a piece of chalk directly toward the camera, implying a personal address to viewers, and a young man about to jump into a swimming pool invites viewers with a gesture of his hand to join in as he jumps into the water. Words flash

> over top of the images: 'You're living it', while the voice-over says, 'Don't wait 'til you graduate. At CSU, you're not just learning it – you're living it!'

The visual images in this video emphasise physically fit and attractive young adults having fun, socialising in groups and enjoying a range of sport and leisure activities. While images of learning are not absent, they are punctuated and largely overshadowed by the music and rapidly flashing images of youthful leisure activity. According to Theo van Leeuwen (2005), rhythm functions as an important source of cohesion in multimodal texts, forming a 'key link between semiotic articulation and the body' (p. 181). Rhythm in multimodal texts both 'divides the flow of time into measures' (p. 181) in ways that are directly connected to the rhythmic coordination of bodily actions and movements, and in turn 'plays a key role in articulating meaning because it foregrounds the sounds or movements that carry the key information of each measure' (p. 182). The rapid pace and insistent rhythmic pulsing of the electro-dance music in the CSU video both dominate and urge viewers forward, calling to mind Anne Cranny-Francis's (2005) observation that the function and power of sound in multimedia texts is 'to touch the individual physically as well as emotionally' (p. 59). As she notes in her discussion of the function of music in film, '… by using music that audience members associate with other events or situations, the score foregrounds the intertextual practice, encouraging viewers to bring other (individual) associations to the film' (p. 79). In this instance, the visual images tell more than one story about student life at CSU. However, the music that furnishes the rhythmic soundscape of the video, together with the video's final images of students sharing popcorn and crowds of young people dancing underneath flashing lights at an indoor party, together function to provide a cohesive narrative (van Leeuwen, 2005) that invites viewers to imagine the total experience of university life as a kind of never-ending dance party.

Through written and spoken text, the phrase 'You're not just learning it, you're living it' constructs a hierarchy between learning and lifestyle, in which lesser value is placed on the former ('just learning') than the latter ('living'). This hierarchy is underscored by the visual hierarchy of learning-related images depicted in the video. What is foregrounded, hence privileged, is active student participation involving 'hands-on' learning activities such as practising procedures on patients or animals, and working in a film/sound studio. Study using books and computers, by comparison, is relegated to fleeting glimpses of hands typing on a keyboard or a hand brushing lightly over books on the library shelves. We are not meaning to suggest here that learning should only be conceptualised, engaged in or represented in its most traditional forms. Rather, we are interested in the ways that action, movement, image, sound, and spoken and written text conspire in this video to represent learning as a less desirable 'poor cousin' to leisure and fun. The video implies that the students depicted are happy and already living the 'good life' on the basis of their choice of university, and through the camera angles and direct gestures to camera, viewers are invited to take up a first-person position and join in the fun.

Students interviewed in the videos produced by other universities present similar sorts of views. For an Arts/Law student in the two-minute University of Western Australia (UWA) video, the single most enjoyable thing about her first year at UWA was that she could 'hang out on the oak lawn and have coffee with your friends and go to a class where you are with so many people you have so much in common with'. A UWA Sports Science student said that 'walking around uni and always seeing someone' they knew was the single most enjoyable thing about her first year. For an

Arts/Science student 'there were lots of parties and there's a lot going on so' and that 'ticked all of the boxes' for her with regard to her choice of university. A UWA Math/Science student reported that the highlight of his year was organising a social Ultimate Frisbee team and 'we just played that for the year as a group'. Meanwhile a Griffith University video titled 'Day in the life of a Gold Coast student' reminds viewers of the importance of a social life. That video depicts another attractive young woman with long hair and casually dressed in short shorts, observing that 'I manage to fit in my entire timetable over three days, and still have time to study, work and have an important social life – so come check it out'. The student's gaze to camera and direct address to viewers constitutes a 'demand' in which 'the participant's gaze (and the gesture, if present) demands something from the viewer, demands that the viewer enter into some kind of imaginary relation with him or her' (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 122). Unlike the UWA videos, where students interviewed appear to be speaking to an off-camera interviewer, viewers of the Griffith video are actively invited to accompany – hence 'to form a pseudo-social bond of a particular kind with the represented participant' (p. 123), in this case, the narrator/student. Viewers are addressed as though they are accompanying the narrator/student through various aspects of her day, including her arrival at a class where she notes that the class sometimes get to work with local professional football teams, and volleyball practice on the beach. While she briefly discusses study and preparation for exams, the tenor of comments such as 'It's a bit of work, but I'm not too worried', downplays any potential concerns about academic success.

Success in the university space is linked in these videos with personal success and 'happiness', and is offered as an element of an active, fun life that need not be disrupted by undertaking university studies. Desire and aspiration for the kind of university education on offer, is to desire well and to ostensibly be rewarded with the promise and experience of self-actualisation, personal fulfilment, friendship and relationships, and the enjoyment of leisure and pleasure. Elsewhere (Drew, et al., in press 2015) we have argued that the online promotions of elite schools focus similarly on happiness as a signifier of institutional worth, functioning as both the reward for appropriate educational choice and as a natural entitlement for those who desire well. Learning, while important, is cast as a secondary concern to student happiness and wellbeing, appealing to parental concerns as well as to middle-class aspirations that tether good choosing to notions of good parenting (Kenway & Bullen, 2001). In university promotional videos, education is cast as a secondary concern to lifestyle. Happiness through social networks and activities functions similarly, appealing to perceived concerns and anxieties of young adults who have yet to take on the responsibilities of professional careers and other adult responsibilities, and tethering a happy university experience to the promise of future happy lifestyles.

'Make your studies worth living': cosmopolitan campuses and racialised entitlements

As Australian universities compete for students in the global knowledge economy, it is hardly surprising that their promotional depictions of university experience and the good life it supposedly guarantees should represent non-Anglo and international students included in their extant and prospective student demographics. This is particularly the case for universities with inner city campuses, which tend to portray

proximity to city attractions and cosmopolitan lifestyles as a distinguishing feature of university experience.

'Create your own Melbourne'

> This two-minute long University of Melbourne video clip begins with a young Asian woman cycling on a vintage bike along the banks of the Yarra River, waving and chatting to an Anglo man of a similar age wearing a University of Melbourne t-shirt and rowing on the river. Both young adults are depicted as active, independent and physically fit and attractive. The song 'Luck' by Melbourne indie/pop band, Kilby, furnishes the soundtrack that gently plays over the action. The film follows the young woman as she continues cycling through trendy inner Melbourne's laneways, past cafes, shops and bars. Even the graffiti seems to greet her, as the camera zooms in on a motif that spells out 'Good to see you too, babe'. As the cyclist arrives on campus and greets another attractive young woman, the camera moves on to show other white, South Asian and East Asian students – skipping down stairs past prestigious sandstone buildings, racing to and from classes, seated in modern lecture theatres and inside sandstone buildings with stained glass windows, working on computers and iPads, chatting on university lawns and in cafes, smiling, flirting, and laughing together throughout the day. The final scene depicts the various students featured throughout the daytime scenes now convening together at night underneath the flashing neon lights of an Asian inner-city nightclub. 'Make your studies worth living' the clip urges in bold written text shown at the close.

The images of Melbourne seen in this short video construct the city as synonymous with the youthful, urbane, and hip young adult demographic who are the target market of promotional texts of this sort. As we have argued elsewhere, promotional texts such as these function both as a means of constructing institutional identities, and are also 'sites for the construction of idealised students, and of the gendered, racial and class fantasies' (Wardman, et al., 2010, p. 250) perpetuated in educational institutions. In this particular video, the city functions as both selling point and motif for the idealised cosmopolitan student demographic whose desirability as educational consumers is signified through images of mobility, camaradarie and attractiveness.

Create your own Melbourne is typical of other such university videos in its depictions of happiness, lifestyle and leisure as the orienting goal of university participation. In an interesting departure from videos on other Australian university websites, it features an Asian girl in the starring role, as well as featuring several other Asian students throughout the clip. We see this as a potentially productive shift away from the tendency among educational promotions to depict a 'token' Asian or Aboriginal person. In one sense, this can be seen as reflecting both the University of Melbourne's large international student base as well as the internationalisation of the Australian higher education sector in recent decades. Not only is Australia recognised as one of the most "aggressive" competitors in the international market (Kell & Vogl, 2012), its largest group of incoming students are from the Asia Pacific region, 'with eight of the top 10 countries being from either South East or North Asia' (p. 30). Despite the potential shift toward a more inclusive representation of international and non-Anglo students in university promotions, however, it is worth noting that the online written script for this video makes no mention of race or ethnicity. Instead, the students depicted in the video are merely referred to as male or female students, in an extraordinary whitewashing of the video's overt visual claims to cosmopolitanism and cultural diversity.

It could be argued that the promotion of lifestyle over learning potentially works against the interest of Australian universities trying to market themselves to competitive international markets where considerable importance is given to world rankings, reputation and perceptions of academic excellence among global elites (Brown, Lauder, & Ashton, 2011).

However, and of particular interest here, alongside depictions of the university experience as pleasurable and personally rewarding, we note the predominance of Asian students being typically shown in these types of promotional videos as being hard at work in libraries, computer classrooms and science labs. This potentially reassures international parent and student consumers – and particularly those in Asian countries – that the quality of education is not compromised by the lifestyle options on offer. Themselves figured as commodities in the global competition for students from the Asia Pacific region, Asian students depicted as hard-working and high-achieving 'take on value as subjects in the educational marketplace precisely because of their potential' (Gottschall, et al., 2010, p. 26). Thus they function as a textual counterpoint to the images of leisure and lifestyle that more typically tend to feature white students. By visually depicting these racialised Others primarily as studious, serious and hard-at-work, while mostly white students party, shop, play sports and socialize, the contradictory narratives of higher education as simultaneously academically rigorous (for those stereotypically Othered as high-achievers) and carefree and fun (for the entitled 'locals' in what Ghassan Hage (2000) refers to as a 'White Nation') are maintained.

Images from other university websites juxtapose white and Asian students in ways that gesture similarly toward global competition and the prospects for joining a global elite, in what has been described as a global 'war for talent' which is essentially 'a battle for money, status and power within the ranks of professional workers' (Brown et al., 2011, p. 97). In the high-stakes international jobs market, where a university education is no longer sufficient to secure future employment prospects, global elite universities have become attractive to students and recruiting corporations from around the globe, precisely because 'they are believed to have the best and brightest students' (Brown et al., 2011, p. 9). The promise of this competitive edge in the global jobs market features prominently in the online promotions of Australian universities. For example, The University of Technology Sydney (UTS), for example, features a video titled *UTS Undergraduate Students* in which students and recent graduates discuss their reasons for choosing UTS – citing factors such as the city location of the campus, the practical 'hands on' approach of courses, and the preparation of students for careers in industry.

Again, happiness is signified in these promotional texts both by the featured students' expressions of enthusiastic satisfaction with their chosen course and institution, as well as the presumed positional advantage (Hirsch, 1977; Marginson, 1995) secured (through 'good' educational choices) in the form of imagined future success in seeking and gaining future employment. Yet these imagined successes are situated within territorializing processes that Cranny-Francis (2005) argues are always in process, such that 'In attempting to communicate with the user, the site operates as a territorializing apparatus, implicating the user within its own narrative, its own meaning-system' (p. 130). Thus implied promises of enhancing one's industry-readiness and marketability are also accompanied by attempts to balance the presumed aspirations of both international and local students in ways that tacitly privilege whiteness. For instance, in the UTS clip, while Asian students are seen wearing safety goggles or lab coats, only white English speaking students talk about

their course experience. The stereotype of serious-minded, hard-working Asian students is maintained without posing a challenge to the entitlements and employability of the white Australian students. Similarly, in the University of Melbourne video, university experience is represented as part of a self-actualising, agentive endeavour – thus 'creating your own Melbourne' is achieved in terms of access to cosmopolitan leisure and lifestyle that promise, as the clip's motto proclaims 'Make your studies worth living'. In this clip, fleeting interactions between Anglo and non-Anglo students are framed with the 'symbolic architectures' (Synott & Symes, 1995, p. 141) both of Anglo institutions – rowing, sandstone buildings, stained glass windows, and manicured lawns, *and* cosmopolitan lifestyle and leisure activities that are simultaneously distinctive to Melbourne as well as attractive to international education consumers. In either case, the commodity of positional advantage acquired through the choice of what is represented as a cosmopolitan university experience in a 'White Nation' becomes another form of entitlement to happiness, within 'a process of accumulating Whiteness' (Hage, 2000, p. 67).

Conclusions

This paper has considered how online promotional videos embedded in Australian university websites draw on the 'promise of happiness' (Ahmed, 2010) to construct appeals to the presumed desires of educational consumers. Our analysis shows how student lifestyles, identities and aspirations are being constructed in terms of entitlements to the 'good life', as images focused on leisure and pleasure equate a good choice of university with a happy social experience for students who are typically depicted as youthful, attractive, active and fun. Learning, scholarship and educational pursuits in such texts tend to be relegated to the background, depicted as activities that potential students can expect to compartmentalise in order to ensure that the leisure and social dimensions of university life can be fully enjoyed. Our analysis here also shows how racialised appeals to leisure and lifestyle operate to construct Whiteness and white privilege as products of good educational choices. In the highly competitive global knowledge economy, choosing well – that is to say, making a choice of university that offers to secure happiness through lifestyles *as well as* through future employment prospects in the international jobs market – includes (for racialised and Othered non-Anglo students) not only working hard to achieve success, but also benefiting from access to cosmopolitan cities and culturally diverse student demographics within the overarching context of a 'White Nation' (Hage, 2000). We see these institutional branding and marketing texts as located within and speaking to the desires and aspirations of local and international student markets, and as one means by which discourses of higher education are being shaped by market logics that equate 'good choosing' with happiness as the good chooser's immediate goal and future reward. Educational pursuits such as learning, scholarship, and critical thinking make only minimal appearances in the texts analysed here. Instead, prospective students are invited to think of these only as possible (though unlikely) disruptions to social activities. Learning and living are segregated as oppositional binaries, in which experience trumps knowledge, educational choice is predicated on leisure and lifestyle, and study is only worth doing if it offers its choosers enough happy rewards to compensate for the inconvenience of (maybe) being expected learn something.

References

Ahmed, S. (2010). *The promise of happiness.* Durham & London: Duke University Press.

Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life.* Durham & London: Duke University Press.

Alreck, P. L., & Settle, R. B. (1999). Strategies for building brand preference. *Journal of Product & Brand Management, 8*(2), 30–144.

Aspara, J., Aula, H.-M., Tienari, J., & Tikkanen, H. (2014). Struggles in organizational attempts to adopt new branding logics: The case of a marketizing university. *Consumption Markets & Culture, 17*(6), 522–552.

Blackmore, J. (2003). Tracking the nomadic life of the educational researcher: What future for the feminist public intellectuals and the performative university? *The Australian Educational Researcher*, *30*(3), 1–24.

Blackmore, J. (2014). Cultural and gender politics in Australian education, the rise of edu-capitalism and the 'fragile project' of critical educational research. *Australian Educational Researcher, 41*(5), 499–520.

Brown, P., Lauder, H., & Ashton, D. (2011). *The global auction: The broken promises of education, jobs, and incomes.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Chapleo, C., Durán, M., & Díaz, A. (2011). Do UK universities communicate their brands effectively through their websites? *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 21*(1), 25–46.

Cranny-Francis, A. (2005). *Multimedia.* London: Sage.

Drew, C., Gottschall, K., Wardman, N., & Saltmarsh, S. (2016, in press). The joy of privilege: Elite private school online promotions and the promise of happiness. In A. Koh, & J. Kenway (Eds.), *Elite schools: Multiple geographies of privilege* (pp. ??-??). London & New York: Routledge.

Gray, B. J., Fam, K. S., & Llanes, V. A. (2003). Branding universities in Asian markets. *Journal of Product & Brand Management, 12*(2), 108–120.

Gottschall, K., Wardman, N., Edgeworth, K., Hutchesson, R. & Saltmarsh, S. (2010). Hard lines and soft scenes: Constituting masculinities in the prospectuses of elite all-boys' schools. *Australian Journal of Education, 54*(1), 18–30.

Hage, G. (2000). *White nation: Fantasies of White supremacy in a multicultural society.* London: Routledge.

Hemsley-Brown, J., & Oplatka, I. (2006). Universities in a competitive marketplace: A systematic review of the literature on higher education marketing. *International Journal of Public Sector Management, 19*(4), 316–338.

Hirsch, F. (1977). *Social limits to growth.* London: Routledge.

Kell, P., & Vogl, G. (2012). *International students in the Asia Pacific: Mobility, risks and global optimism.* Dordrecht: Springer.

Kenway, J., & Bullen, E. (2001). *Consuming children: Education, entertainment, advertising.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication.* London: Arnold.

Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*, 2nd Edn. London: Routledge.

Lolich, L. (2011). … and the market created the student to its image and likening. Neo-liberal governmentality and its effects on higher education in Ireland. *Irish Educational Studies, 30*(2), 271–284.

Marginson, S. (1995). Markets in education: A theoretical note. *Australian Journal of Education, 39*(3), 294–312.

Marginson, S., & Considine, M. (2000). *The enterprise university: Power, governance and reinvention in Australia.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mirzoeff, N. (1999). *An introduction to visual culture.* London & New York: Routledge.

Molesworth, M., Nixon, E., & Scullion, R. (2009). Having, being and higher education: The marketization of the university and the transformation of the student into consumer. *Teaching in Higher Education, 14*(3), 277–287.

O'Loughlin, D., MacPhail, A., & and Msetfi, R. (2015). The rhetoric and reality of research reputation: 'Fur coat and no knickers'. *Studies in Higher Education, 40*(5), 806–820.

Olssen, M., & Peters, M. (2005). Neoliberalism, higher education and the knowledge economy: From the free market to knowledge capitalism. *Journal of Education Policy, 20*(3), 313–345.

Onsman, A. (2008). Tempering universities' marketing rhetoric: A strategic protection against litigation or an admission of failure? *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 30*(1), 77–85.

Peters, M. (2011). *Neoliberalism and after? Education, social policy, and the crisis of Western capitalism.* New York: Peter Lang.

Peters, M., & Olssen, M. (2011). Neoliberalism, higher education and knowledge capitalism. In M. Peters (Ed.), *Neoliberalism and after? Education, social policy and the crisis of Western capitalism* (pp. 41–74). New York: Peter Lang.

Rose, G. (2012). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials, 3rd Edn.* London: Sage.

Rowlands, J., & Rawolle, S. (2013). Neoliberalism is not a theory of everything: A Bourdieuian analysis of *illusio* in educational research. *Critical Studies in Education*, 54(3), 260–272.

Saltmarsh, S. (2004). *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 28*(4), 445–454.

Saltmarsh, S. (2011). Economic subjectivities in higher education: Self, policy and practice in the knowledge economy. *Cultural Studies Review, 17*(2), 115–139.

Sellar, S., Gale, T., & Parker, S. (2011). Appreciating aspirations in Australian higher education. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 41*(1), 37–52.

Sidhu, R. (2003). *Selling futures: Globalisation and international education.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, School of Education, University of Queensland.

Stier, J., & Börjesson, M. (2010). The internationalised university as discourse: Institutional self-presentations, rhetoric and benchmarking in a global market. *International Studies in Sociology of Education, 20*(4), 335–353.

Synott, J., & Symes, C. (1995). The genealogy of the school: An iconography of badges and mottoes. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 16(*2), 139–152.

van Leeuwen, T. (2005). *Introducing social semiotics.* London: Routledge.

Wardman, N., Hutchesson, R., Gottschall, K., Drew, C., & Saltmarsh, S. (2010). Starry eyes and subservient selves: Portraits of 'well-rounded' girlhood in the prospectuses of all-girl elite private schools. *Australian Journal of Education, 54*(3), 249–261.

Wardman, N., Gottschall, K., Drew, C., Hutchesson, R. & Saltmarsh, S. (2013). Picturing natural girlhoods: Nature, space and femininity in girls' school promotions. *Gender and Education*, *25*(3), 284–94.

Saltmarsh, S. (2016, in press). 'No, I'm not OK.' Disrupting 'psy' discourses of university mental health awareness campaigns. In E. Petersen, & Z. Millei (Eds.), *Interrupting the psy-disciplines in Education* (pp. ??-??). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Williams, R., & Van Dyke, N. (2008). Reputation and reality: Ranking major disciplines in Australian universities. *Higher Education, 56*(1), 1–28.

Webpages

Charles Sturt University, *You're living it*, URL (accessed 4 June 2015): http://www.csu.edu.au/go/livingit

Griffith University, *Day in the life of a Gold Coast student*, URL (accessed 4 June 2015): http://www.griffith.edu.au/future-students/high-school-students/whats-university-like

University of Melbourne, *Create Your Own Melbourne*, URL (accessed 6 January 2015): http://www.unimelb.edu.au/

University of Melbourne, *Text Description – This is Our Melbourne,* URL (accessed 30 July 2015) http://www.unimelb.edu.au/accessibility/create-your-own-melbourne/

University of Technology Sydney, URL (accessed 10 July 2015): http://www.uts.edu.au/future-students/undergraduate

University of Western Australia, URL (accessed 6 January 2015): http://www.uwa.edu.au/